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ABSTRACT

Although the United States has been described as a nation of homeowners, homeownership is not uniformly distributed across population groups. The migration of individuals to Houston, Texas, has intensified the competition for decent housing in that city. The rapid population growth has also accelerated the competition between lower and middle-income residents for the neighborhoods of the central city. Spiraling housing costs have limited the single family home market to a select few. While the overall housing condition in Houston is booming, poverty pockets continue to exist amidst affluence. Black families are less likely to be homeowners than their white counterparts. The need for public housing far exceeds the supply. Residency in public housing reflects the segregated patterns of the city: blacks in black neighborhoods and whites in white areas. The movement of blacks to Houston's suburbs lagged behind that of whites. The percentage of blacks in the city's suburbs actually decreased between 1960 and 1970. Overall, the economic prosperity that Houston is experiencing has had little impact in reversing housing segregation levels. (Author/RLV)

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BLACK HOUSING PATTERNS IN A SOUTHERN METROPOLIS: COMPETITION FOR HOUSING IN A SHRINKING MARKET

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is on residential housing patterns of blacks in a sunbelt city, Houston. The migration of individuals to the city has intensified the competition for decent housing. The rapid population growth has also accelerated the competition between lower and middle-income residents for close-in neighborhoods of the central city. Spiraling housing costs have limited the single-family home market to a select few. While the overall housing condition in Houston is booming, "poverty pockets" continue to exist admist affluence. Black families are less likely to be homeowners than their white counterparts. The need for public housing far exceeds the supply; residency in public housing reflects the segregated patterns of the city: blacks in black neighborhoods and whites in white areas. Blacks moving to Houston's suburbs lagged behind that of whites; the percentage of blacks in the city's suburbs actually decreased between 1960 and 1970. Overall, the economic prosperity that Houston is experiencing has had little impact in reversing housing segregation level.

Introduction

A great deal of attention has been focused on the recent population shifts in the United States. That is, the movement of individuals from the "snowbelt" to "sunbelt" continues to be a focal point of debate and controversy in terms of resource allocation and political representation. The theme of this paper revolves around competition for decent housing by blacks in Houston,Texas. Houston, as the focal city, has a unique status for several reasons: namely, (1) Houston is the nation's fifth largest city (over 1.6 million residents), (2) it is a leading city in terms of housing starts, (3) it is one of the fastest growing cities in the United States, (4) it is the largest city in the South, (5) it has the largest concentration of blacks of any city in the South, and (6) it attracts over 60,000 new residents each year.

Rapid population growth in Houston has meant an intensification in land use. The city's land area expanded from a mere nine square miles in 1850 to over 540.9 square miles in 1978. Thus, Houston is the third largest city in terms of land area. The Houston residential patterns manifest an irregular configuration. The housing patterns is a combination of marked contrasts, the city exhibits an irregular quality of life pattern among neighborhoods (Farrell, et al, 1979). As the city does not have any comprehensive zoning ordinance, this may allow for the diversity of structures and social institutions in specific areas (Babcock, 1973: 254). Houston's poor live in "poverty pockets" which are spread throughout the city. It is not uncommon to find a "poverty pocket" adjacent to a stable neighborhood.

Residential growth continues along racial lines. The black population is located in a broad belt that extends from the south-central and southeast portions of the city into northeast and north-central Houston. Nearly three-fourths of the black residents live in census tracts that are more than 70 percent black. The black population has steadily increased over the past twenty years; the percentage of blacks in the city grew from 21 percent (125,000) in 1950 to over 26 percent (317,000) in 1970.

Competition For Decent Housing

The housing market response to increased competition for limited resources appears to have placed lower-income and minority households at a disadvantage in securing decent housing (See Bullard, 1978; 1979a; 1979b). Factors which include housing discrimination, loss of rental housing stock in the inner city, and high cost of single family houses in close-in neighborhoods have contributed to the out-migration of the young and better educated residents of the inner city. The movement away from the central city of families with children is likely to leave behind the affluent, the unmarried, the childless couples and the poverty pockets of minority and lower-income residents who may be "trapped" in the inner city.

Houston has been singled out as the "mecca" of the sunbelt. Between 4,000 and 5,000 individuals move to the city each month; it is estimated that approximately one-fourth of the new arrivals are blacks. Between 1970 and 1975, over 280,000 new residents entered the Houston metropolitan area; over 144,000 new households were added during this same period; and over 117,000 new housing units were constructed between 1970 and 1975. The Houston Chamber of Commerce (1976) states that: "during the recent recession

a severe decline in vacancies resulted from reduced residential construction without a corresponding drop in demand, clearly demonstrating that similar adverse circumstances in the future could bring about a housing shortage".

When housing becomes tight, discrimination becomes very difficult to prove and easy to practice; often the minority prospect gets delay and redtape and the white prospect gets the apartment (Foley, 1973; Bullard, 1978). Housing discrimination and segregation continued to increase even in the growth cities. The opening up of opportunities to minorities in Houston has not dramatically reduced the segregation level. Minority residents in areas that are experiencing a "new prosperity" have not shared the full benefits of the gorwth phenomenon as majority group members (Bullard, 1978; 1979a; Bullard and Tryman, 1979).

The re-discovery of the inner-city has also accelerated the rate by which rental housing units are converted to either single-family dwellings or condominiums. Many of the larger older homes in the inner-city (which were once used as three and four rental apartments) are now being sold by owners as single units. This conversion process reduces the quantity of rental units available to lower-income families. As the rental houses often do not have restrictions concerning children, relocation to apartment complexes places a special hardship on those lower-income families who have children and require more than two bedrooms.

Middle-income families are also affected by the conversion of apartment complexes from rental units to condominiums. Individual families who do not choose to purchase their apartment must seek alternative housing. Older dwelling units are often razed in some inner city neighborhoods to

make way for "townhome" sites; houses are purchased for the land. Small lots which once had a single-family house are being replaced with multi-family townhomes (e.g., four and five units); pricing of these units may range from the low thirties to the high nineties.

Newer apartment complexes generally are developed on the periphery of the city; development follows the pattern of settlement around perimeter highways as in the case of Houston's Loop 610, Atlanta's Loop 285, or Dalls' Loop 635; newcomers often settle on the periphery of the city.

The concept of "neighborhood revitalization" has been used as a banner for re-building the inner-city. A key component in President Carter's urban policy focuses on revitalizing and re-building decaying cities. However, revitalization of older neighborhoods takes on double meaning. On the one hand, revitalization has fostered racial and ethnic exclusion. Inner-city neighborhoods once again have become "in" places to live as more and more young middle-class couples move into these areas. These young urban dwellers may find inner-city lifestyles somewhat more "livable" than their older counterparts who escaped to the suburbs. This tolerance has generated a new sense of confidence by lending institutions in once decaying and deteriorating neighborhoods. In short, the psychological and financial barriers associated with "redlining" in inner-city neighborhoods are gradually being lifted. Secondly, revitalization has seldom been accomplished without some degree of displacement of low-income and minority residents. If revitalization programs are to benefit inner-city residents, then neighborhood preservation must also guide the renewal efforts.

Black Homeownership

Homeownership in the United States has been steadily increasing since the late forties. In 1970, nearly two of every three American families (62.9 percent) owned their homes. However, the rate of homeownership seems to have leveled off. The percentage of families owning their homes in 1974 and 1975 was the same (64.2 percent). These data suggest that lower-income as well as middle-income families are having difficulty in purchasing homes (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1977).

Blacks and other minority families must contend with spiraling housing costs as other Americans along with individual and institutionalized housing discrimination. A combination of these factors make it extremely difficult for prospective minority homeowners to secure adequate housing. Nationwide, approximately 42 percent of all Black Americans are homeowners. The South, as a region, leads the nation for blacks who own their own homes with 47 percent of the black families as homeowners; the North Central region has 42 percent of the blacks owning homes; the West 40 percent; and the Northeast has the lowest rate of black homeownership with 29 percent (Blackwell, 1975).

Black homeownership and renter rates for selected urbanized areas are presented in Table 1. In these metropolitan areas, the majority of black residents are renters. Specifically, nearly half the black residents are homeowners in the Seattle-Everette, Indianapolis and Houston metropolitan areas; over 45 percent of the black households in the Denver and Dallas metropolitan areas are homeowners; a little less than a third of the black families in the New Orleans metropolitan area are homeowners; and one-fourth of the blacks in the Chicago SMSA and nearly one-fifth of the blacks

in the New York metropolitan area are homeowners (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1972).

(Table 1 about here)

The data clearly illustrate that homeownership is not equally distributed across population groups. Specifically, blacks are less likely to be homeowners when compared to their white counterparts.

While the overall housing picture in Houston is booming, a sizable segment of the area population continues to be ill-housed. Houston's Community Development Office (1976) has estimated that twenty-two percent, or 94,129 households, of all the city's households are inadequately housed; over forty-two percent, or 78,247 households, of all the renter households are inadequately housed; and eight percent, or 15,882 households, of all owner households in Houston are ill-housed.

New housing subdivisions are pushed farther from the downtown area; single-family homes in the inner-city are selling at premium prices. Previously owned homes in Houston average around $67,000 and the average price tag on new homes is $62,500. These costs have priced many lower and middle-income households out of the housing market.

Housing in Houston's inner-city minority areas is not reflective of the city's "booming" market. The historical patterns of segregation continue to operate in the housing search and selection process (Bullard, 1979a; 1979b; Bullard and Tryman, 1979).

Blacks are segregated from both whites and Mexican-Americans (Phillips, 1979). One indicator of the pattern of racial segregation is the composition of the

public schools. In 1970, the Houston Independent School District had a racial and ethnic composition of 50 percent white students, 33 percent blacks and 17 percent Hispanic students. By 1978, the black students enrollment had climbed to 45 percent of the public school enrollment, Hispanics included 24.8 percent, and white pupil enrollment had fallen to 30.2 percent of the total enrollment. If increases continue at the current rate, Hispanics and Blacks will comprise 8 of every 10 Houston public school pupil.

Houston's Conventional Public Housing

The Public Housing Act of 1937 instituted the first real "subsidy" program, public housing. This Act authorized annual federal contributions to amortize the capital costs of publically owned housing built by local authorities. Thus, public housing is funded by the federal government and administered by local authorities. The rents for public housing are low, since the authority is not paying off the initial capital charges. Conventional public housing is often characterized by its institutional rigidity, architectural sterility, shoddy construction, and inadequate financing, (Solomon, 1947: 165). In many projects, the physical design of the buildings visually reinforce their "institutional" character. The number of families eligible for public housing on the basis of income vastly exceeds the number of units available for occupancy.

In the state of Texas, there are over 48,800 units of public housing. Over one-third of these are located in the three largest cities in Texas: Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio. The three major ethnic groups (i.e., Black, Brown, and White) are fairly equally represented as tenants in public housing statewide: namely, blacks comprise 37 percent of public housing, whites

comprise 32 percent, and browns occupy 31 percent of Texas public housing (Texas Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, 1974).

Statewide, nearly half the tenants of public housing have annual family incomes of less than $1,000, and over two-thirds have annual incomes under $3,000. Nearly 70 percent of the families in public housing in Texas receive some form of cash or other government assistance payments (Texas Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, 1974).

The financing and construction of public housing units in Houston lags behind that of other major metropolitan areas of comparable size. Houston provides approximately 3,000 households with low rent public housing; the Houston Housing Authority has also committed itself to building 600 new units of public housing for the city. These units will be the first apartments built by the Authority since the 1950's. The ethnic composition of Houston's public housing tenants indicates that 62 percent of occupants are black, 25 percent are white, 7 percent are Mexican-American, and 6 percent are Oriental (Houston Housing Authority, 1976).

Subsidized low rent housing is located in both black and white neighborhoods. However, minority project residents tend to be housed in neighborhoods of high minority populations (See Table 2). The largest concentration of blacks in low rent housing is in Cuney Homes, Carver Courts and Kelly Village where over 99 percent of the tenants are black. Mexican-American tenants are highly represented in Irvington Village (54%) and Clayton Homes (32%). Two public housing projects have a significant Oriental population (e.g., Vietnamese families): Clayton Homes (7%) and Allen Parkway Village (5%). Conversely, several projects have an overwhelmingly

white population: namely Van Ro Apartments, Lylerly and Bellerive. The pattern for leasing housing through the City Housing Authority appears to mirror the larger housing market. That is, whites are successful in leasing housing in predominately white neighborhoods and blacks in predominately black neighborhoods.

(Table 2 about here)

Houston lags behind other cities of comparable size in providing public housing for low-income families. The waiting lists for conventional public housing as well as the rental housing allowance programs (i.e., Section 8 housing) are long; over 4,500 families are on the waiting list for Houston's Housing Assistance Payment Program, Section 8 Rental Assistance (Bullard,1977). In short, the need for additional housing for lower-income households has far outstripped the number of public housing units.

Black Suburbanization

The number of blacks who moved into suburbia almost doubled during the decade of the 1960's. The black population in the suburbs increased by 1.5 million during the period 1960 to 1970, whereas the white component rose by 33.3 million. However, a national trend of black suburbanization has not been clearly demonstrated. Houston's blacks, for example, have not made a move to the suburbs in significant numbers. A recent study by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (1979:5) indicates that the black share of Houston's suburban population decreased as the white population grew at a much faster rate (See Table 3). In 1960, blacks comprised nearly 13 percent of Houston's suburban population; the 1970 figure had dropped to

less than 9 percent. Houston's black population in the suburbs in 1970 increased by 7.7 percent from 1960. However, this increase is attributed to city growth rather than movement of blacks to the suburbs.

(Table 3 about here)

Data in Table 3 also reveal that a number of other Southern cities experienced a decline in the percentage of blacks in their suburbs for the period 1960 and 1970. Dallas' black suburbanites decreased from 8.3 percent to 5.2 percent from 1960 to 1970; the percentage of blacks in Atlanta's suburbs went from 8.5 percent to 6.2 percent; and the percentage of black suburbanites in New Orleans dropped from 15.9 percent in 1960 to 12.5 percent in 1970. The share of the black suburban population in the above cities, along with Houston, decreased while the white share increased.

At present, Blacks comprise approximately 6 percent of the suburban population in the United States. Suburbanization of blacks does not necessarily mean racial integration; it often represents an extension of the segregated patterns long typical of the central city or a re-segregation of blacks (Blackwell, 1975; Bollen and Schmandt, 1975; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1978; 1979).

CONCLUSION

The movement of individuals into the Houston area has intensified the competition for decent housing. The housing supply has lagged some-

what behind the demand. This is especially true for close-in neighborhoods or inner-city areas. The decline in construction appears to have accelerated the rate of re-entry by middle-class residents into inner-city neighborhoods. The re-discovery of the inner-city by middle-class residents places them in direct competition with lower-income families for the same housing. Affluent households have the economic advantage over lower-income families in their scramble for housing in a dwindling market.

Although the United States has been described as a nation of homeowners, homeownership is not uniformly distributed across population groups. Nearly two of every three Americans own their home, while only 42 percent of Black-Americans are homeowners. The south, as a region, leads the nation for black homeownership. In Houston, for instance, forty-eight percent of the black households are homeowners. Homeownership has been increasing over the past thirty years. However, it appears that the rate of homeownership has peaked. The spiraling housing costs have priced many middle and lower-income families out of the housing market (e.g., single family detached house). This factor is likely to alter the lifestyles of American families and change the landscape of the nation's urban centers.

Lower-income families probably are hit hardest by the intensification of persons seeking housing in the inner-city. Their economic position may preclude them from serious contention for properties in the central city. Public housing is just one strategy that has been used to house the poor. The number of lower-income and elderly families that qualify for public housing often far exceeds the number of units provided by the local housing authority. Houston has a long way to go in meeting the housing need for

it's lower-income families. The city's overall housing situation appears to be stable; the city contains a number of "poverty pockets". Many of the citys' public housing projects are located in these "poverty pockets" which appears to reinforce the long established patterns of racial and economic segregation.

At the time when many middle-class whites are making the move to the central city, blacks are beginning to move to the suburbs. However, a national trend of black suburbanization has not been clearly established across the nation. At present, blacks comprise about six percent of the nation suburban residents. As a region, the South has a higher percentage of blacks in the suburbs than any other region. Recent suburban migration trends indicate that whites continue to move to the suburbs at a faster rate than blacks. Moreover, a number of southern cities have experienced a drop in the black share of suburban population. Houston is a typical example of such a case (e.g., black share of suburban population dropped from 12.9 percent in 1960 to 8.9 percent in 1970). Other southern cities which had a decrease in the percentage of blacks suburbanites included Baltimore, Dallas, Atlanta, and New Orleans.

Although the Houston area is experiencing rapid growth, economic prosperity, and increased employment opportunities for minorities, th long established patterns of residential segregation continue to persist. A slow down in housing starts is likely to intensify the competition for homes in older areas. Increase competition for limited housing often generates conflict and hostility as "outsiders" move in and "reclaim" older neighborhoods.

Table 1. Percent of Blacks Owning and Renting Homes for Selected Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas[a]

SMSA	Population (million)	Percentage Black Homeowners	Percentage Black Renting
New York	11.57	18.5	81.5
Los Angeles-Long Beach	7.03	37.7	62.3
Chicago	6.97	26.3	73.7
Cleveland	2.06	39.8	60.2
Houston	1.98	48.4	51.6
Newark	1.85	25.1	74.9
Minneapolis-St. Paul	1.81	42.5	57.5
Dallas	1.55	45.4	54.6
Seattle-Everett	1.42	49.9	50.1
Milwaukee	1.40	33.2	66.8
Atlanta	1.39	39.9	60.1
Denver	1.22	46.2	53.8
Indianapolis	1.10	49.1	50.9
New Orleans	1.04	31.2	68.8

[a]Data in the table were adapted from the U.S. Bureau of the Census', County and City Data Book 1972 (A Statistical Abstract Supplement, U.S. Government Printing Office 1972.

Table 2. Ethnic Composition of Houston's Low Rent Housing

Houston's Low Rent Housing Projects	Number of Units	Ethnic Composition[a]				
		Percent Black	Percent Hispanic	Percent White	Percent Vietnamese	Percent Black in Census Tract[b]
Clayton Homes	327	58%	32%	3%	7%	18%
Cuney Homes	564	99%	1%	-	-	95%
Allen Parkway Village	1,000	73%	3%	9%	5%	84%
Kelly Village	333	100%	-	-	-	95%
Irvington Village	318	25%	55%	20%	-	7%
Beall Village	152	51%	3%	46%	-	18%
Pleasant Village	144	45%	4%	51%	-	89%
Carver Courts	30	100%	-	-	-	94%
Van Ro Apartments	40	-	-	100%	-	1%
Lylerly (75)	200	7%	4%	89%	-	1%
Bellerive	210	1%	4%	95%	-	1%

[a]Data on ethnic composition of housing project were based on statistical profile compiled by Houston Housing Authority's Data Processing Division (September, 1976).

[b]Census tract data are based on the 1970 U. S. Census.

Table 3. Black Suburbanization in Selected Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas[a]

City	% Black SMSA 1960	% Black SMSA 1970	% Black Central City 1960	% Black Central City 1970	% Black Suburbs 1960	% Black Suburbs 1970	% Change Suburbs 1960 – 1970
New York	11.5	11.3	14.0	21.2	4.8	5.9	55.1
Los Angeles	7.6	10.8	12.2	16.5	3.6	6.2	105.2
Chicago	14.3	17.6	22.9	32.7	2.9	3.6	65.5
Philadelphia	15.5	17.5	26.4	33.6	6.1	6.6	34.1
Detroit	14.9	18.0	28.9	43.7	3.7	3.6	26.1
Washington	24.0	24.6	53.9	71.1	6.4	7.9	98.3
Baltimore	21.4	23.7	34.7	46.4	7.0	6.0	15.9
Houston	19.5	19.3	22.9	25.7	12.9	8.9	7.7
Dallas	14.8	15.9	19.0	24.9	8.3	5.2	4.8
Atlanta	22.8	22.3	38.3	51.3	8.5	6.2	23.6
Miami	14.7	15.0	22.4	22.7	11.2	12.2	57.6
New Orleans	30.6	31.0	37.2	45.0	15.9	12.5	27.4

[a]Source: Adapted from Table 1 of Recent Suburbanization of Blacks: How Much, Who and Where? HUD-PDR-378. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (February, 1979).

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